

European Committee on Governance and Democracy (CDDG)
28 November 2018, Strasbourg
11.30 am, Agora G01

**Speaking Notes for Ms. Samardžić-Marković, Director General of
Democracy**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is as always a pleasure for me to welcome you to the Plenary Meetings of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance.

This year the Secretary General, in his report on the State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law, addresses the "*Role of institutions, Threats to institutions*"

The Secretary General draws attention to the challenges facing the Council of Europe and the member states, the attempts to subvert checks and balances on power and "*attempts to undermine institutions at the European level, namely the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights themselves, and at the level of member states*".

In terms of democratic institutions specifically *“there is an increasingly aggressive use of technology to influence electoral processes and outcomes and which threatens to undermine public trust in the electoral system.”*

Also: *“Corruption – sometimes pervasive – continues to be a problem and member states’ compliance with the Council of Europe’s Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) recommendations is slowing down.”* This is also a threat to democracy.

Again, I invite all the members of the CDDG to closely examine the report and how you can address the challenges and recommendations in the report along with your colleagues in the capitals.

We also face other challenges. Uncertainties in relation to the situation of the delegation of the Russian Federation in the Parliamentary Assembly and its impact on the financial situation of Organisation’s Ordinary Budget persist. At this time, there is not much more that I can say on this subject but we will keep you informed of any developments.

As I have said before though, I can commit to making every effort to ensure that Democratic Governance remains a priority for the Directorate General of Democracy and that we continue to provide a political hub as well as technical and legal assistance by way of the Centre of Expertise, through peer reviews and the Rapid Response Service or in any other way we can. I believe that solid democracy and good governance are two faces of the same coin: you cannot have one without the other in the long term. And the democratic backlash that we see today is derived from political challenges as well as the challenges in good governance and therefore it needs to receive smart political responses but also adequate governance solutions.

In light of this we must strive to further strengthen the effectiveness, efficiency and practical relevance of the work of the Council of Europe.

For this reason, also a meeting of chairpersons of CoE intergovernmental committees was held on 20 September 2018. Your Chair, Mr Peter Andre was one of the 16 Committee chairs who met.

Why did the Secretariat organise the meeting? We wanted to:

- further raise awareness of the place of intergovernmental work in the CoE institutional architecture and in member States
- enhance relevance of intergovernmental committees as platform for exchanging good practice and for standard setting

Issues I would like to bring to your attention include the following:

In terms of enhancing the reactivity of intergovernmental committees to emerging challenges

- I see as one of the strengths of the CDDG its success in following up on the findings and recommendations of the SG reports, e.g. participation of civil society, NGOs and citizens in political decision making or improving public ethics
- For this reason, I would like to encourage you to look more at challenges such as e-democracy and artificial intelligence as well as the issue of digital threats to democratic processes.

I am now coming at more procedural, but very important questions. The first of them is how to enhance coordination in the capitals between line ministries and liaison with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs?

- the member states are represented by the Foreign Ministries in the Committee of Ministers which decides on the budget of the Organisation
- what can you, as CDDG members do?
 - involve colleagues from other Departments and Ministries which are concerned by the issues dealt with by the CDDG, but inform your MFA in the Capital
 - inform the Permanent Representative of your country on the Committee's work and on its relevance for the country

A second question regards the possible revitalisation of the practice concerning ministerial conferences: would this be an effective way to provide a political impulse for intergovernmental action?

- Perhaps member States want to give possible thought to whether ministerial conferences should be considered, and deal for example with the ways public administration deals with challenges to democratic society and democratic governance.

Peter Andre undoubtedly can report in more detail about the meeting of committee chairs and in particular their lunch discussion with the Secretary General.

Finally, also as a word of encouragement following this lunch and Peter Andre's statement: the Secretary General recommended to follow the CDDG's practice of inviting Ministers to the Committee meetings to increase in the political quality of debates.

The participation of ministers further reinforces the CDDG's role as a forum for exchanging information, views, experience and good practice. In combination with the practical assistance by the Centre of Expertise in the reforms and projects in their countries, and also in many other member States, it illustrates the added value this presents to member States.

On Friday Mr Lovro Kušćević, Minister of Public Administration of Croatia will share with you its country initiatives and experience in relation to public administration and local government reforms

To conclude, may I count on you and ask you again to argue the case of the Council of Europe's Democratic Governance programme – and the whole of the Council of Europe - in your capitals, with your Foreign Ministries, and more widely in your countries? If you do not do that, nobody else can.

I thank you for your contributions, involvement and dedication and look forward to strengthening our active bilateral and multi-lateral cooperation, technical exchanges, peer reviews.

We will continue to put all our resources and means, including the Centre of Expertise, at your disposal so as to make sure that together we can address the challenges facing us and to ensure that your work has real-life impact.